



PROGRAM NEWS

United States Agency for International Development

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**USAID/Nicaragua
Development Program
1998-2003
(U.S. Millions of Dollars)**

<i>Rule of Law and Good Governance</i>	<i>43.6</i>
<i>Small Producers</i>	<i>47.0</i>
<i>Natural Resources</i>	<i>14.0</i>
<i>Healthy Families</i>	<i>35.0</i>
<i>Primary Education</i>	<i>17.5</i>
<i>Food Aid</i>	<i>55.0</i>
TOTAL	US\$ 212.1



Organic Vegetable Production Provides Jobs and New Economic Opportunities

Almaciguera, Nicaragua—Tucked away in the pine covered mountains of Estelí, Gustavo Cerrato is farming two acres of land that normally would lay abandoned this time of year. With an irrigation system and a gasoline pump that he received on credit through a USAID financed program with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Cerrato is growing cauliflower, broccoli, red leaf lettuce, Tat Tsoi (Chinese lettuce) and romaine. Not only has Serrato diversified his crops, he has also gone “organic”, opening up new market opportunities.

“This is turning out to be very profitable,” said Cerrato, who sells his organic cauliflower for 22 cents a head compared to two cents he used to receive per head when he planted nonorganic cabbage.



Gustavo Cerrato plants a new vegetable crop every 21 days using plug trays that he buys from a nearby organic plant nursery. With staggered plantings, Cerrato has weekly harvests and a steady income.



A group of 54 farmers is producing high-value organic vegetables from financing they received from USAID through Catholic Relief Services. The project provided technical support for the farmers and secured a buyer.

In addition, Cerrato has a guaranteed buyer, secured through the USAID/CRS program who comes about three times a week to buy vegetables. The produce is packed and then distributed to Managua supermarkets under the Soledad Organic label. With staggered plantings, Cerrato has a steady weekly vegetable harvest and guaranteed sales.

Cerrato has already covered his production costs with his first harvest of 2,500 heads of red leaf lettuce. By using organic fertilizers and biological pest control, Cerrato is reducing his production costs, helping the environment around his farm, (located in a natural reserve), and protecting his family’s health.

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Organic Vegetable Production—New Economic Opportunities

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“Considering that I don’t have to use chemicals and I have a steady income from the sales, these organic vegetables have been a great benefit for my family,” said Cerrato.

The funding for the organic vegetable project (approximately \$120,000) came from a \$6.3 million grant to CRS under USAID’s Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction program. Starting with a group of 10 producers, who planted organic onions, the number of organic vegetable farmers increased to 54. Farmers received financing for drip irrigation systems, seeds and organic fertilizers and pesticides. The program also paid for technicians that worked with farmers in growing the new crops using organic methods. Now with a secure market through a contract with Soledad Organics, these farmers are able to pay back their loans and continue producing.

The program has also generated employment and incomes for other residents in nearby communities.

In the community of La Garnacha, Reynaldo Rocha’s small plant nursery supplies organic vegetable seedlings to the area’s producers. Rocha sells plug trays of 128 to 200 organic seedlings at \$1 a tray. With farmers planting every 21 days, Rocha has secured a steady income.

In the same community, several farmers are producing compost with earthworm cultivation that they



Franklin Cerrato runs a laboratory on his father’s farm in the mountains of Estelí developing a natural biological pesticide that provides his family an income and reduces production costs for farmers.

sell to organic vegetable producers.

The USAID/CRS organic vegetable project also gave a boost to the fledgling Soledad Organic company, a small private Nicaraguan enterprise dedicated to promoting organic agriculture. With increased organic vegetable production for the local market and export, Soledad Organic provides permanent employment for 30 people and seasonal jobs for up to 60 more at its processing plant in the Sebaco Valley.

As the successes of organic farmers become known, more producers are willing to give organic farming a try. Camilo Valle used to plant potatoes and cabbage using chemicals on his small two-acre plot. He now plants organic vegetables. Although he lost some plants at the beginning, the increased value of the organic crops compensated his losses.

Said Valle: “This is much better for me, and since I don’t use chemicals I’m not poisoning myself.”



At the Soledad Organic processing plant, workers pack organic vegetables for the local market and for export. Organic vegetable farming has created new employment for residents in the Sébaco Valley, including many women.

Biological Laboratory in the Mountains of Estelí

Franklin Cerrato is not a biotechnician and he’s never gone to college but he is the main producer of a natural, biological pest control that is helping organic vegetable growers save their crops.

*In a small laboratory, sponsored by the National University of Agriculture on his father’s farm, high in the Estelí mountains, Cerrato cultivates *Diadegma semiclausica*, a wasp that acts as a parasite on the larvae of the *Plutela* worm—a devastating pest of leafy vegetables. Farmers normally control the pest by fumigating at least 10 times with chemicals—an expense of about \$91 an acre.*

At a cost of \$8 per acre farmers can protect their crops using Cerrato’s biological pesticide with the added benefit that they are not poisoning themselves.



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